Myanmar Witness: English Press Release

July 2021

International OSINT taskforce to verify & investigate incidents in Myanmar

A major new initiative to record, verify and investigate incidents in Myanmar has been launched today. Myanmar Witness will independently collect, preserve, process, investigate, verify and review incidents of possible interferences with human rights. The project will be sharing information with the United Nations' Independent Investigative Mechanism for Myanmar (IIMM), to ensure evidence for future accountability for human rights violations is verified and preserved.

The international project team brings together leading experts in open-source intelligence techniques, digital forensics, weapon system identification and disinformation, with a network of dozens of civil society actors from across Myanmar. The project will be coordinated by the Centre for Information Resilience, a UK-based non-profit with expertise in Open-source Intelligence (OSINT) techniques to expose, document and counter harms committed by authoritarian states and malign actors.

Myanmar Witness will encourage civilians to safely submit digital content including photos, videos, social media posts and other data via a submission form. This collection and processing of evidence will be in line with international accountability standards. The project team will also independently verify incidents on open-source social media channels. All the data will be independently verified, hashed, and kept safely and securely, in line with international best practices and to preserve evidence for any possible future judicial processes. Safeguarding the identity of witnesses and those providing data will be of utmost importance.

Already, Myanmar Witness has uncovered and verified:
-   Evidence of reprisal attacks by the Myanmar Army
-   Evidence of shelling of civilian areas and religious buildings
-   Widespread indications of intention to harm, if not kill, demonstrators
-   Evidence of mass arrests
-   Violence against medical workers

A spokesperson for Myanmar Witness said:

"The world has watched with horror at the growing number of apparent human rights incidents in Myanmar. At its heart, Myanmar Witness is about justice and accountability. Our analysts and researchers will work to independently investigate, verify and preserve alleged human rights violations of people across the country. We'll be working closely with international bodies, NGOs and the media to ensure there is a clear, verified record of alleged incidents. Crucially, we'll be sharing our findings with the IIMM to preserve evidence. Our work today will hopefully go some way to ensure accountability tomorrow."

As well as a resource to preserve evidence for future judicial processes, the Myanmar Witness team will be freely available to journalists seeking to investigate possible human rights interferences. We welcome submissions or inquiries from journalists and media organisations. For more information, please visit: www.info-res.org/myanmarwitness

The project is supported through funding from the UK Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office.

NOTES TO EDITORS

The Myanmar Witness programme will independently collect, preserve, process, verify, investigate and review incidents of possible interferences with human rights. Our methodological approach includes the following protocols:

- Information collected by, or submitted to, MW undergoes a rigorous process of standards used in other similar industry leading documentation projects, and in line with international accountability standards.

- The collection phase sees investigators using open-source techniques to collect information in a manner to ensure all sides of events are captured. The information is then stored for analysis, along with original post information, metadata, time, and filename. Information is also hashed using MD5 hashing, which is block-chained with a publicly available timestamp, so that anyone, anywhere, can look up when that information was first collected. This builds on the provenance of the information collected; should information be tested for manipulation in years to come, the publicly available MD5 hash value will remain the same.

- Once information is collected and preserved, it is verified through stages of geolocation (identifying where it was taken using satellite imagery), and chronolocation (identifying when it was taken). Information is also further analysed for processing, by giving it a rank on a violence scale (which also acts as a trigger warnings to protect the mental health of those viewing the data), categories, possible acts, tags observed, and a brief description of what the information is. Information is also flagged as to whether it is private, and whether or not the content reveals privacy details such as personal identification or address.

- To ensure accuracy, we assign peer-reviews to all content before it is marked as verified.

- Once information is verified, it is flagged for follow-up investigations by our open-source investigative team, where multiple points of verified data are used to identify trends, patterns and specific events.